

Professor Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University

Dear Sir,

as a reader of your highly estimated Columns in Current Contents / Life Sciences, I feel challenged to make some remarks on your article " Essence of Life or Death ? "

They refer only to the last paragraph of this article, as it is reprinted in CC, April 15, 1970 issue 15 p M. 1. There, quite surprisingly, you lend strong support to the advocates of large - scale, easy accessible legal abortion. May I therefore take the liberty to bring forward some of my doubts on your argumentation, and add that I would be very interested in your comments.

Apart from the general statement, that every freedom of the person ends at the edge of other persons rights (i.e. that there is no freedom or right of the mother without the rights of the unborn child,) I would like to say:

1st The statement that laws restricting abortion amount to compulsory pregnancy to my mind is misleading, because it starts out in the middle of the problem and not at its beginning: A woman who does not want to become pregnant, normally does not have to! It seems to me that we should speak about personal freedom and responsibility at the beginning of human actions and not only if undesired consequences follow. Pregnancy can hardly be regarded as a primary and isolated event which only concerns the respective woman and nobody and nothing else - at least not from a biological and psychological point of view.

2nd The statement that the decision for abortion is one for private morals sounds fine, but everyone working in this field knows that the overwhelming majority of abortion seeking patients are not coming because of such a moral decision or are not even able to make this decision. Pretending to help a woman according to her decision, one is in fact dealing with people who because of lack of education and information, lack of responsibility, lack of morals or most times just lack of clear thinking because of panic, pressure and despair do not make a real and free " decision ", but just a " short circuit " - between pregnancy and abortion. Many of them would not do so, if instead of an " abortionist " who does not care at all about their real problems, they would find " help ". It is shutting ones eyes to the facts, if just taking the baby

away is considered to be the due help ! On the long run it is always more expensive to cure the symptoms and not the causes. Should not the aim of medical help be to prevent abortion (and their reasons and consequences!) rather than to perform it ?

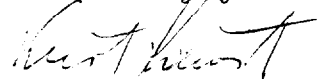
3rd, but not least: to me it is a break - neck leap to plead for abortion right away after quoting Hitler's exterminatoria ! More philosophically speaking: what is the difference between extermination of life which arbitrarily has been declared to be " sub - human ", " not worthy of living " (Hitler) and the extermination of life, which exactly as arbitrarily has been declared to be " only potential " (e.g. an embryo or fetus) as the abortionists do ? In both cases the arbitrary, though pseudo - scientifically or pseudo-ethically masked decision is made, that the respective unwanted life in reality is no " actual " or " valuable " life and therefore may be exterminated. If one agrees that man decides on what is " actual life " and which human life under certain conditions may be " interrupted " then nobody can condemn Hitler either ! And therefore over here we strongly feel, that the foremost duty of the medical profession is to stand for the integrity and inviolability of life in all its aspects as well as for its health. Would'nt that be a better service to every - not only the violence-shaken american - community and more worthy of compassionate support, than easing and promoting abortion ?

Let me summarize: What I strongly deny in current trends, is, to pervert the ideas of freedom, human right, responsibility and moral in order to get pseudo-arguments to make abortion on a large scale an acceptable solution for problems, which cannot be solved in such an easy and symptomatic way. Of course there has always been and probably will be abortion, but it is a different thing to regard it as something which should be replaced by better solutions or to establish it as a solution. (By the way, the Russians have tried and abandoned this type of solution long ago).

If life has to become more meaningful, then we have to prepare people for a happy life of fulfillment and satisfaction also in the field of human sexuality and inter-sexual relations. This can only be achieved by teaching " love " instead of " sex " only, and by integrating the whole problem into the inseparable unity of human life, instead of isolating it ! Therefore I think it a fundamentally wrong way to battle the problem of unwanted pregnancy by performing more (and more) legalized abortions.

Since I am really involved, I hope you forgive me my outspoken comments, which only plead for more human, more comprehensive and more adequate solutions to real complex problems.

Very sincerely yours



Kurt K. Loewit, MD

NIH - Fellow